

A Journey from Darkness towards Light: the Qur'anic Perspective on the Concept of Light - Part III

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The way God has made the whole creation is based on a combination of light and darkness. Of course, with further reflection, it becomes clear that the combination of light and darkness is not a combination of two real things; rather, it is a matter of different degrees of light. Darkness is not a real substance that can be mixed with light. We speak of combination of light and darkness just for the purpose of easier communication and understanding: when we have perfect light, we say that there is no darkness at all mixed with it, and when we have imperfect light, we speak of a mixture of darkness and light. But darkness is nothing but lack of some degree of light. And this is why God does not speak of “creating” light and darkness; rather, He says: God created the heavens and earth and *designed* light and darkness. (Qur'an 6:1)

So everything in this world has light. God Himself is light. So we have a light that is perfect and lacks nothing. In *Dua Kumayl*, we say:

يا نور يا قدوس!

O Light! O Pure!

The fact that pure has been also mentioned as a name for God is very important. It indicates that all other lights are somehow limited and

imperfect; it is only God that is *Quddus* (pure) and can be glorified, not anyone else.

Other than this creative Light, there are created lights—that is, the entire creation. Human beings and jinns (and maybe other beings) have free will to increase or decrease their light. We talked about the light provided for those who want to increase their light through divine guidance. This is why we said that all scriptures are described in the Qur'an as light-giving books. In particular, this has been mentioned as a description for the Qur'an. We mentioned that Prophet Muhammad (s) is also described as being a light:

يَأَيُّهَا النَّبِيُّ إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَاكَ شَهِدًا وَ مُبَشِّرًا وَ نَذِيرًا وَ دَاعِيًا إِلَى اللَّهِ بِإِذْنِهِ وَ
سِرَاجًا مُنِيرًا

O Prophet! Indeed We have sent you as a witness, as a bearer of good news and as a warner and as a summoner to God by His permission and as a *radiant lamp*.
(Qur'an 33: 45-46)

According to this verse, The Prophet (s) is also light. No other person has been described like this in the Qur'an. It does not mean that other people have no light. Everyone has some degree of light, especially prophets and other good people, but the Prophet (s) is somehow exceptional. Reading the verse carefully, we see that he is not only light, but also a *siraj* (lamp or lantern). There may be many things that have light, but not all of them are sources of light. *Siraj* is essentially designed to shine and to illuminate. The adjective *munir* (radiant) is also mentioned in the verse after the word *siraj* for further emphasis, so the Prophet (s) is described as a “radiant lamp” that constantly illuminates.

There is a *dua* recommended to be recited after *Ziarat Al-i Yasin*, in which we Ask God to send *salawat* (salutations, blessings) to the Prophet (s):

اللهم انى اسئلك ان تصلى على محمد نبى رحمتك و كلمة نورك

Oh God! I ask you to send *salawat* to Muhammad the Prophet of your mercy and the word of your light.

This is one of the most beautiful expressions about the Prophet (s) we have in our sources, which indicates that the Prophet (s) is the most pure light as far as a created light can be pure. Although only God is the perfect light, the Prophet (s) has the highest degree of light possible for a created being.

At this point, it should be discussed how this light was given to the Prophet (s). For this purpose, we should reflect on the following verse of surah 33:

هُوَ الَّذِي يُصَلِّي عَلَيْكُمْ وَمَلَائِكَتُهُ لِيُخْرِجَكُم مِّنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ وَ
كَانَ بِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ رَحِيمًا

It is He who blesses you, and so do His angels, that He may bring you out from darkness into light, and He is always most merciful to the faithful. (Quran 33:43)

The mechanism God uses as our guardian to take us from darkness to light is explained in this verse. He provides us with guidance, and, after we believe, He takes us to light by sending us *salawat*. This is not a superficial *salawat*; rather, it is a real package of God's mercy.

God's mercy is the key factor in the whole creation without any exaggeration. Whatever happens in this world, whatever comes to this world is because of the mercy of God. His mercy cannot be compared to anything else among His attributes. In the paper "*Image of God in the Qur'an*," we made a very detailed investigation about all divine attributes in the Qur'an, and we found that mercy has been emphasized on far beyond any other divine attribute. About 600 cases directly related to His mercy. All chapters of the Qur'an start with the formula *bismillah al-rahman al-rahim* (in the name of God, the *Beneficent*, the *Merciful*) except for surah Tawbah; however, because surah Naml contains two *bismillah* formulae, the occurrences of this formula in the Qur'an is equal to the

number of the surahs. Surah Fatihah, which is like a preface to the Qur'an and is so important that *salat* is not accepted without reciting it, not only starts with *bismillah al-rahman al-rahim*, but also in its third verse the names Rahman (Beneficent) and Rahim (Merciful) are repeated, which indicates the importance of God's mercy. Of course, these are only the times God's mercy has been mentioned directly. Otherwise, the total number of direct and indirect references to divine mercy are much more. Nothing comes to existence except through, and because of, God's mercy.

Here, we are talking about a special type of divine mercy that takes us from darkness towards light, and that is *salawat*: "It is He Who blesses you, and so do His angels, that He may bring you out from darkness into light" (Qur'an 33:43) Whenever you come across *salawat* or its derivatives, you must know that it is about light.

We will come back to this verse and discuss about how one can qualify for this *salawat* and move towards light. However, as far as the Prophet (s) is concerned, his qualification is guaranteed. In the verse 56 of the same surah, God says:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ وَمَلَائِكَتَهُ يُصَلُّونَ عَلَى النَّبِيِّ يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا صَلُّوا عَلَيْهِ وَسَلِّمُوا تَسْلِيمًا

Indeed God and His angels bless the Prophet; O you who have faith! Invoke blessings on him and invoke Peace upon him in a worthy manner. (33:56)

This is a confirmation that, for the Prophet (s), this constant dispatch of *salawat* (indicated by the verb *yusallun* in present tense) is guaranteed. Now, if we take this and the previous verse into consideration, we realize that God and His angels are constantly moving the Prophet (s) towards higher degrees of light. This is why the Prophet is a *siraj munir* that shines forever, and no one can extinguish his light: "They desire to put

out the light of God with their mouths, but God shall perfect His light” (Qur’an 61:8).

The first part of the verse 33:56 says what God and His angels do; the second part commands the believers to follow God and his angels and send *salawat* to the Prophet (s) and to send *Salam* to him or submit themselves to him (as the word *taslim* can mean either saying *salam* or submitting to someone; of course, saying *salam* to someone entails having a peaceful relation with that person).

At this point, one might ask, how can we send *salawat* to the Prophet (s), especially if it involves sending him mercy and light? The answer is, when we send *salawat*, we do not increase the light of the Prophet (s) directly; rather, we ask God to send His *salawat* to the Prophet (s). In a hadith, it has been said that *salawat* from God is mercy, *salawat* from angels is *tazkiyah* (purification), and *salawat* from believers means praying. Our Sunni brothers have narrated a hadith that says:

خرج رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم فقلنا: قد عرفنا كيف نسلم عليك
فكيف نصلي عليك؟ قال: قولوا: اللهم صل على محمد وعلى آل محمد
كما صليت على آل إبراهيم إنك حميد مجيد، اللهم بارك على محمد
وعلى آل محمد كما باركت على آل إبراهيم إنك حميد مجيد.

We said to the Prophet (s): “We know how to send *salam* to you, but how can we send *salawat* to you?” The Prophet replied: “Say: ‘Oh God! Send your *salawat* to Muhammad (s) and his family, as you sent your *salawat* to Abraham and his family. Truly, you are praised and you are glorious. Oh God! Bless Muhammad (s) and his family, as you blessed Abraham and his family. Truly, you are praised and glorious.’” (Muslim 1991, 305)

The shortest accepted form of sending *salawat* to the Prophet (s) and his family is to say,

اللَّهُمَّ صَلِّ عَلَى مُحَمَّدٍ وَعَلَى آلِ مُحَمَّدٍ

Oh God! Send your *salawat* to the Prophet (s) and his family!

Of course, the light of the Prophet (s) will shine forever whether we send him *salawat* or not, since God Himself and His angels constantly send him *salawat* according to the verse we mentioned earlier. But if we follow God and send him *salawat*, we have indeed done two things. First, we have helped the Prophet (s) by being a good believer and reflecting the light of the Prophet (s), so more people can benefit from him (s). There are 1.6 billion Muslims in the world; if all of them were really reflecting the light of the Prophet (s), no darkness would remain. We have the responsibility to help the Prophet (s) by being similar to him as much as we can. In this way, we can even be said to have increased the light of the Prophet (s) in the world. But if we do not act properly, not only we will not reflect the light of the Prophet (s) but also we ourselves become veils covering his light. People look at us and want to see the Prophet's (s) light through us. We have to be so pure, so good and honest that we can reflect the light of our Prophet (s) to the best of our ability.

Second, when we send *salawat* to the Prophet (s), God sends *salawat* to us. This has been pointed out in a narration from the Prophet (s) himself.¹ In other words, when we pray for the Prophet (s) to receive *salawat*, God gives him *salawat* and also gives us. This effect has been mentioned for *salawat* in particular, though we are also taught that in general whenever we pray for someone, God gives both to us and to the one we pray for. So if I really want something, the best way to get it is to ask God to give that to a brother or sister who also needs it. In the case of *salawat*, we have both a specific narration and also this general principle that applies to *salawat* as well. Therefore, by sending *salawat* to the Prophet (s), we become qualified for receiving God's *salawat*, which

¹ *Al-Kafi*, vol. 2, p. 492. The hadith reads as follows:

عَنْ أَبِي عَبْدِ اللَّهِ ع قَالَ قَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ص مَنْ صَلَّى عَلَيَّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيَّهِ وَ مَلَائِكَتُهُ
وَ مَنْ شَاءَ فَلْيَقُلْ وَ مَنْ شَاءَ فَلْيُكْمِرْ

will take us from darkness to light: “It is He who blesses you, and so do His angels, that He may bring you out from darkness into light” (Qur’an 33:43).

One group of the people who receive *salawat* from God are the people who are patient, about whom the Qur’an says,

وَلَنَبْلُوَنَّكُمْ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنَ الْخَوْفِ وَالْجُوعِ وَنَقْصٍ مِّنَ الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَنْفُسِ
وَالنَّمَرَاتِ وَبَشِّرِ الصَّابِرِينَ الَّذِينَ إِذَا أَصَابَتْهُمُ مُصِيبَةٌ قَالُوا إِنَّا لِلَّهِ
وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ

We will surely test you with a measure of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth, lives, and fruits; and give good tidings to the people who are patient. Those who, when an affliction visits them, say, ‘Indeed we belong to God, and to Him do we indeed return. (Qur’an 2:155-56)

These are the people who really believe this simple but profound point that we all belong to God and we will return to Him, and this is why they see no reason to worry. They know that their origin is perfect and so is their destination.

أُولَئِكَ عَلَيْهِمْ صَلَوَاتٌ مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ وَرَحْمَةٌ وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُهْتَدُونَ

It is they who receive the blessings (*salawat*) of their Lord and [His] mercy, and it is they who are the [rightly] guided. (Qur’an 2:157)

With the points we mentioned earlier, we can understand that the sentence “It is they who receive the blessings of their Lord” in the above verse means that they receive light from God, and by this light they “are the [rightly] guided,” as the verse mentions.

Therefore, when a calamity befalls us, if we are not patient, we will be confused not knowing what to do. However, if we are patient, not only

are we rewarded but we will receive further light and be in a better position to understand what to do next.

There is a similar phrase in *Ziyarat 'Ashura*, which reads,

اللهم اجعل في مقامي هذا ممن تتاله منك صلوات ورحمة و مغفرة

Oh God! Make me, right now, one of those who receive *salawat*, mercy, and forgiveness from you.

Whenever one does *ziyarat* of Imam Husayn (a) properly, he receives light, which helps him with regard to his future, putting him in a better position to understand. He also receives forgiveness, which removes any darkness he may have had in his past. Therefore, proper *ziyarat* purifies us. A friend in Qom mentioned a story about someone several years ago, who went to Ayatollah Bahjat one day. The Ayatollah told him that the light that used to be in his face was not there, and that person said that he did not recite *Ziyarat 'Ashura* that day. So every good deed has its light, even if we cannot see it. A student of Ayatollah Ansari Hamadani once saw a special light. Since it was his first experience, he thought that it was the light of God. But the Ayatollah told him that the light he had seen was rather the light of his *wudu'*. So *Wudu'* also has light, as has been mentioned in our hadiths:

الوضوء نور و الوضوء على وضوء نور على نور

Wudu' has light, and [making] *wudu'* upon *wudu'* [i.e., repeating *wudu'*] is light upon light. (Shaykh al-Saduq 1413 AH, 1:41)

Anything we do according to the will of God, every righteous deed has its own light.

Now, let us discuss about a verse from surah Ahzab again:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اذْكُرُوا اللَّهَ ذِكْرًا كَثِيرًا

O you who have faith! Remember God with frequent remembrance. (Qur'an 33:41)

One may ask, what does “frequent remembrance” exactly mean? Is five or ten times considered as frequent? The answer is, when God says *kathir* (frequent), it does not mean five or ten; rather, it means as much as you can. In a narration that will be mentioned later, we will see that God has fixed a limit for everything. For example, obligatory prayers are seventeen *rak'ats* (units), *nawafil* are thirty-four *rak'ats*, fasting in the month of Ramadan is for thirty days, hajj is once in a life time, but remembering God has no limit. The Qur'an praises those who “remember God standing, sitting, and lying on their sides” (Qur'an 3:191). They remember God in every state, without any limitation in time, number, or place.

In the next verse, we read,

وَسَبِّحْهُ بُكْرَةً وَأَصِيلاً

And glorify Him morning and evening. (Qur'an 33:42)

The fact that morning and evening have been mentioned in the verse is because they are two crucial parts of the day, in which we should remember God in a special manner—not that we should forget Him in the rest of the day. So God commands us in this verse to remember Him as much as we can. Then, the next verse (33:43) tells us that what we would receive His *salawat*, which would take us from darkness to light. So the key to receiving God's *salawat* is remembering Him. And I have a very big claim to make here. I believe that every acquired light (not the light we have since our birth) is a result of remembering of God. The light of faith, the light of prayer, the light of fasting, and the light of *wudu'* all come from remembering our Lord. Even the significance of *salat* comes from this:

أَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ لِذِكْرِي

And maintain the prayer for My remembrance. (Qur'an 20:14)

أَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ إِنَّ الصَّلَاةَ تَنْهَى عَنِ الْفَحْشَاءِ وَالْمُنْكَرِ وَلَذِكْرُ اللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ

And maintain the prayer. Indeed the prayer prevents indecencies and wrongs, and the remembrance of God [that you achieve by prayer] is surely greater. (Qur'an: 29:45)

In *Dua Kumayl*, we say,

اتقرب اليك بذكرك

I seek closeness to You through Your remembrance.

And, on the other hand, every loss of light is a consequence of forgetting God. So you don't need to read hundreds of books. Just try to remember God as much as possible, and try not to forget Him as much as you can. Of course, you can't remember God and then disobey Him. You must remember God in everything He has commanded you to do or has prohibited you from. It is impossible to remember God and disobey Him if we know who God is. How can you remember someone you love but do something that will make him unhappy? It is impossible. Even when there is a probability that your beloved wants something, you try to get that for them, let alone when you are certain that they want something for sure.

The Qur'an says:

فَاذْكُرُونِي أَذْكُرْكُمْ

Remember Me, and I will remember you. (Qur'an 2:152)

If you remember God, He will remember you in a special way. The Qur'an also tells us:

نَسُوا اللَّهَ فَنَسِيَهُمْ

They have forgotten God, so He has forgotten them. (9:67)

It doesn't mean that if we forget Him, He will forget us completely. It means that we will be deprived from His special attention, care, and support.

In future parts, we will discuss about this source of light—that is, the remembrance of God—and then we will explore the relation between the remembrance of God and prayer, the remembrance of God and contemplation (*fikr*), and the remembrance of God and glorification.

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